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CLIMATE

The rise of General Benny Murdani

General Benny Murdani is well known for his direction of the bloody invasion and occupation of East Timor. Many believe his elevation this year to head Indonesia's armed forces will mean harsh actions against social unrest.

BY MAX LANE

PANGAB
BENNY MURDANI

Max Lane is a former diplomat to Indonesia and translator of works of Indonesian literature.

OF FEAR

Dramatic evidence of the turn to more violent methods of social control since the coming to power of Benny Murdani is the current campaign involving the murder of alleged so-called 'criminals'. Recently Abdurrachman Saleh of the Legal Aid Institute, in an interview with ABC radio, put the number of people killed at 900. Murdani appears to have given the go-ahead for the campaign.

Every time a new Armed Forces chief or chief of the National Security Command (KOPKAMTIB) is appointed, an 'anti-corruption' campaign is launched. This is to show that the new appointee actually holds power; it has also become a kind of symbolic act used to try to buy a 'honeymoon period' with the more gullible section of the public. Murdani's attempt was the shortest lived yet. Following this dismal failure he latched onto the idea of an anti-crime campaign following what appeared to be a successful such campaign in Yogyakarta. In that campaign dozens of people were killed by the local military.

Over the last few months, several hundred more have been killed. First of all in Jakarta and then later in other provincial cities. Unlike in Jogjakarta however, no government official or agency has taken responsibility for the killings. Although several government figures have given their blessings.

Who is Benny Murdani? Does his elevation to the position of head of the Indonesian armed forces simply mean the final emergence of a new generation of political leaders or are there more significant reasons?

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In March, 1983 there was a session of the Peoples' Consultative Assembly (MPR). These are held every five years to 'elect' a President and Vice-President and determine the "Broad Outlines of State Policy". The membership of the MPR comprises all members of the House of Representatives and an equal number of people appointed by the President. To sew things up even tighter, elected members of Parliament are all vetted, prior to election, by the military security authorities. It is not surprising then that General Suharto (the only candidate) was 'elected' President. His new Vice-President is General Umar Wirahadikusuma, an old crony from the days of the suppression of the Indonesian workers' and peasants' organisations in 1965-66.

As has been the case since 1966, the MPR session was followed by a reshuffle of the cabinet. Each reshuffle has had certain specific features to it. Early cabinets contained ministers from the non-government parties. Later cabinets ditched them and increased the number of generals. This last reshuffle was marked by the following important moves:

- the appointment of intelligence chief Benny Murdani to the position of Commander of the Armed Forces and Commander of KOPKAMTIB;
- the removal from the cabinet of those ministers who had pretensions to significant political power autonomous from Suharto; i.e. the faction chiefs;
- the appointment of more people who are considered to have been administratively successful.

Murdani's Intelligence Background

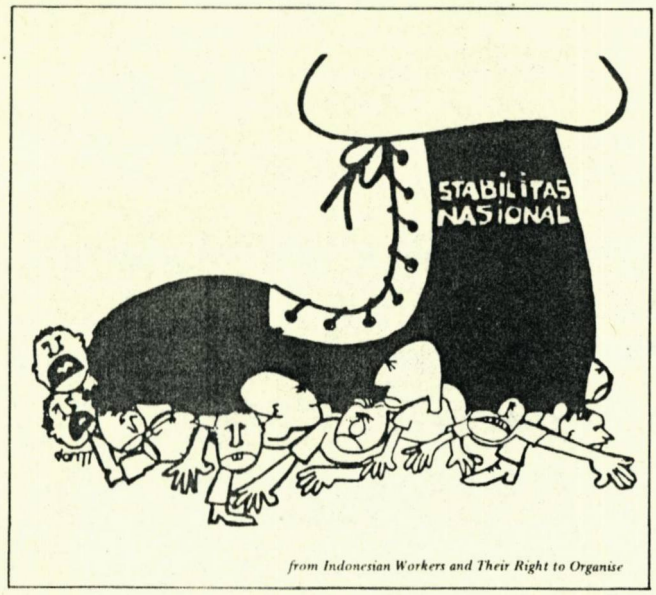
Benny Murdani is a protege of Ali Murtopo from his days of secret pre-1965 negotiations with Malaysia. Murdani has continued his relationship with Murtopo — except that he has now eclipsed his old mentor, who was one of the old faction leaders dumped from the cabinet.

After some time as a consular official in Malaysia and later South Korea, Murdani has worked in military intelligence, with a domestic emphasis.

Murdani has held senior positions in BAKIN (State Intelligence Co-ordinating Board) where Murtopo was Deputy Chairman for a long time. In addition, and probably more importantly, he has been *Assisten Intel* (Assistant for Intelligence) in the Department of Defence and Security. This also made him *Assisten Intel* for KOPKAMTIB. In this position he not only had control over similar *assisten intel* at the provincial and district level but also over the SATGAS INTEL (Kesatuan Tugas Intel — Intelligence Task Forces). It is the SATGAS INTEL which most opposition groups consider has been responsible for much of the direct intimidation and violent tactics against dissent in recent years.

Regeneration

The appointment of Murdani has been seen by some observers as a sign that Suharto is being serious about what is called in Indonesia, 'regeneration'. This is the long promised move to retire many of the older figures of the regime to make way for younger men who will eventually



from Indonesian Workers and Their Right to Organise

take over the reins of government. This kind of speculation has been strengthened, first of all, by a number of other important appointments within the Armed Forces. These include the appointment of Lt. General Rudini (54) as the new Chief of Staff of the Army; Major-General Yogie S. Memet (54) to Commander of Region II (which includes Java) and Lt. General Soepardjo (54) as Commander of Region III (which includes the Celebes). At 54 years old, they were all only 15 or 16 years old in 1945 when the independence revolution started and are therefore not part of the 45 Generation that Suharto and his colleagues claim to "represent".

The removal of the older faction leaders — Ali Murtopo, Amir Machmud and Muhammad Yusuf - from the cabinet has also fueled this speculation.

The question, however, is whether Suharto is preparing to hand over power to a younger layer of military officers or is he working to make them a new basis of support for his own rule?

There are two factors to be considered here. First of all, prior to the March MPR session, there was an unusually large amount of speculation about the possibility of Ali Murtopo (Minister of Information, boss of OPSUS and CSIS), Amir Machmud (Minister for Interior, boss of the Civil Service Corps. KORPRI) and Muhammad Yusuf (Minister of Defence and Security) being candidates for Vice-Presidency. What made this peculiar was that the position of Vice-President was much less powerful than the positions any of these men would be giving up. This fact led to an unmentioned assumption that what they were really concerned about was the matter of who would be Suharto's successor.

In relation to this issue, the removal of the main faction leaders can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, it may reflect Suharto's assessment that jockeying for succession is a first step to jostling him out of power. He thus moves against the faction leaders to ensure that such a development does not eventuate. Secondly, it may reflect a fear on Suharto's part that any signs of encouragement for members of the older generation of regime figures may cause disaffection amongst those a generation below. And those are the soldiers with direct control over active battalions of troops. Thus Suharto moves to assure the younger (by ten years or so) generals that they are going to have their day.

Either way, there is no reason to assume that Suharto has made any decisions about retirement as yet. What he has decided to do is to try to consolidate his position with the armed forces hierarchy at the expense of the regime's political faction leaders.

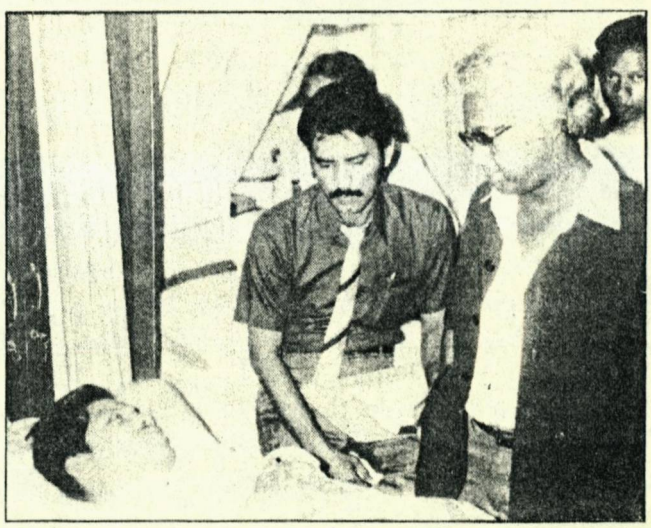
At the same time he has elevated people, such as former Governor of Central Java, Suparjo Rustam, who are considered to have been efficient administrators. Senior civil servants of like ilk have been rewarded with ministries. Those, like Public Works Minister Purnomosidi, who have made major administrative errors, have been replaced. Suharto has thus moved to consolidate his relationship with the administrative apparatus as well.

Social Unrest the Key to Murdani's Rise

But do these moves to consolidate relations with the hierarchies of, first, the military, and secondly, the civilian apparatus explain the appointment of Benny Murdani?

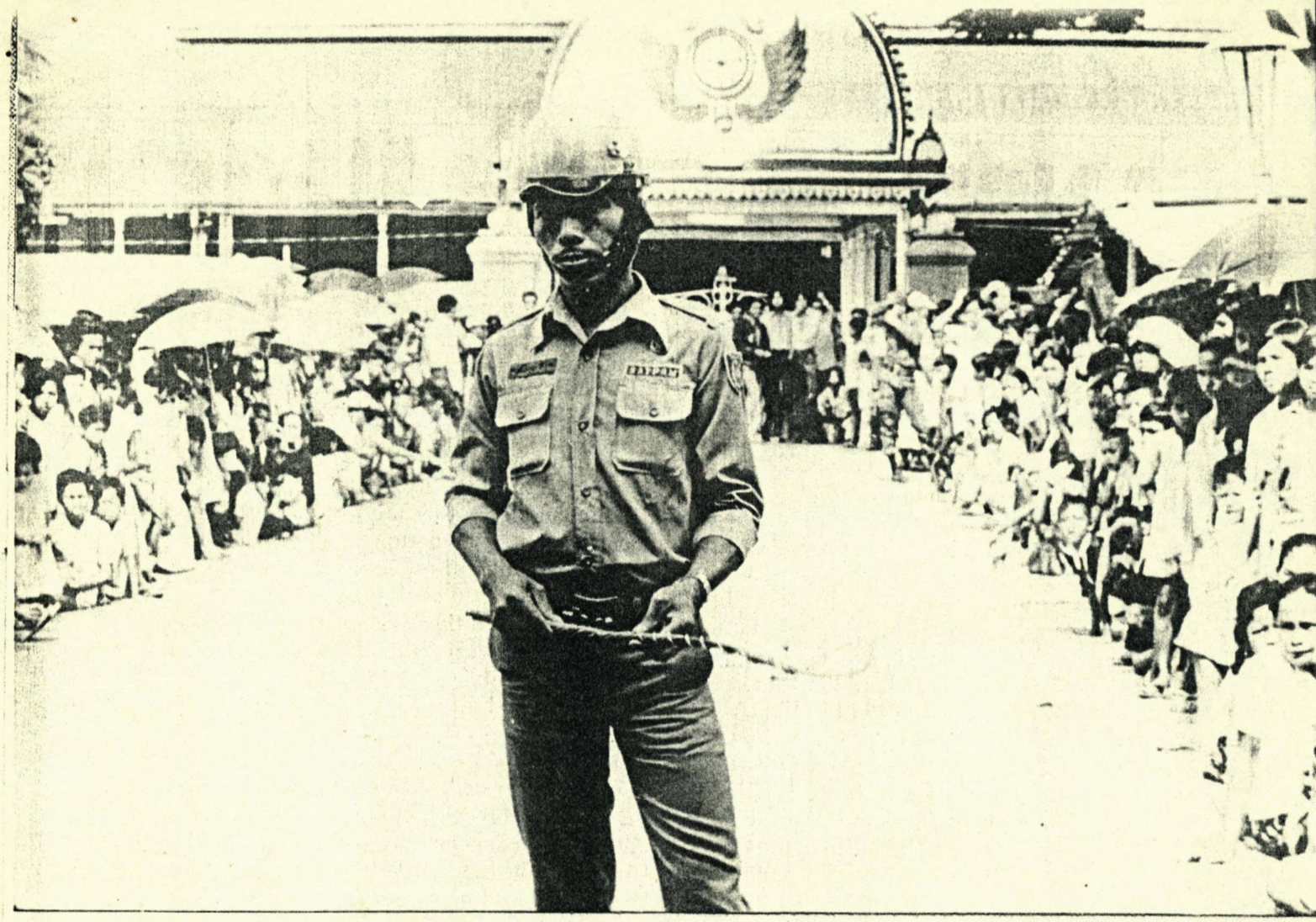
Here we must return again to that speculation about Murtopo's, Machmud's and Yusuf's possible candidacy for vice-presidency. What conditions existed to encourage this kind of speculation?

I think the main condition was the feeling among many people that the regime's social control was breaking down. The three years prior to the MPR session had seen major attacks on Suharto by leading retired generals, ministers and businessmen. There had been major riots throughout Central Java. And these had been followed by persistent and regular small incidents. There has been an increase in industrial unrest — 5,000—6,000 admitted 'worker cases' in 1982. (The former head of KOPKAMTIB, Admiral Sudomo, has been now made Minister of Manpower with responsibility for industrial relations.) There has



ROBIN OSBORNE/RAPPORT

Human rights lawyer, Buyung Nasution (r), visiting the Moslem dissident M. Fatwa in hospital after he was beaten up by, many believe, intelligence agents responsible to General Murdani.



Crowd-control policeman in Jogjakarta, August 1981.

been increasing opposition to the government's policies from some large, highly nationalistic business groups. (One of their papers, *JURNAL EKUIN*, was suspended in March, 83.)

In addition to these political troubles, serious economic problems loom on the horizon. Earnings from exports, mainly oil, have fallen 30% over the twelve months up until April 83. The newspapers report the closure of factories or mass retrenchments. Demand for many products, even *kretek* cigarettes is dramatically falling. There has been a lot of talk about the level of rural poverty, with Suharto himself admitting to *eleven million* of the rural population living below the poverty line. This talk has been accompanied by calls for the rationalisation of agricultural production through the elimination of the millions of land holdings below 0.5 ha. (Agriculture in the past has been heavily subsidised by oil money.)

Over the last months, the government has been forced to take a number of drastic steps which are having the effect of lowering the ordinary people's standard of living. Subsidies on oil products, including kerosene, and on some basic commodities have been abolished or diminished. A 27% devaluation has been carried out.

This combination of persistent political dissent, increasing social restlessness and declining economic fortunes created an atmosphere where people began to think in terms of Suharto being willing to retire for another General. Suharto's dismissal of Murtopo and the others indicated that Suharto was not a pensioner candidate. Meanwhile to cope with increasing political problems Suharto appointed Benny Murdani as Commander of the Armed Forces and Head of KOPKAMTIB. This gave the job of political control of the population to the Indonesian *intelligence network*. Murdani, as boss of the SATGAS INTEL, has been regarded as the most hawkish of the regime's military in suppression of opposition, dissent and restlessness.

Operations attributed to SATGAS INTEL, include such things as the abduction and beating up of moslem dissident M. Fatwa, the disruption of public meetings and other physical harassments. In the recent trial of the alleged mastermind of a hijack of a Garuda plane to Bangkok in 1981, considerable evidence was introduced suggesting that the hijackers had been infiltrated and egged on by *Intel* operatives. And, of course, Murdani is known as the hawkish director of the invasion and military occupation of East Timor.

Indonesian human rights activists fear that the death squads now summarily executing alleged criminals may turn their guns on political opponents of the regime. Therefore, rather than talk about a 'regeneration' of the Indonesian ruling military elite, the rise of Benny Murdani, the dumping of the old faction leaders, and the forging of better relations with the active military and bureaucratic apparatus should perhaps be seen as a move to *streamline the regime's authoritarianism.*

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